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SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR G/TIP, WHA/CEN (BEAL), WHA/PPC (PUCETTI)

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [SOCI](#) [BH](#)

SUBJECT: BELIZE REPLY TO G/TIP INTERIM ASSESSMENT SURVEY

REF: STATE 150188

¶1. Summary. The Government of Belize (GoB) continues to take significant steps to address human trafficking issues, primarily on the public awareness and investigative fronts. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee (the Committee), continues to meet monthly and provides additional resources and linkages to foster intra-governmental cooperation. Belize still takes the issue seriously and progress continues to be made, however, much work remains to be done particularly in the area of prosecution. Post response is keyed to reftel. End Summary.

Investigating and Prosecuting Trafficking Crimes

¶2. In 2007, the GoB continued its commitment to prevent trafficking in Belize. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee chairperson, Anita Zetina, also the CEO of the Ministry of Human Development, is dedicated to combating trafficking and has coordinated several efforts including the Inter American Development Bank (IADB) consultant research and recommendations, training workshops and trafficking investigations. The Committee meets monthly and links several government agencies including a tripartite team of police, immigration, and social workers from the Ministry of Human Development. In October, the tripartite team worked together to conduct an investigation and unannounced raid on a brothel which discovered a 16 year old trafficking victim and resulted in the arrest of one individual charged with human trafficking. The accused will be prosecuted in the Magistrates Court in Orange Walk.

Investigating and Prosecuting Public Officials

¶3. In February 2007, three police officers were arrested and charged with several counts of trafficking in persons as a result of an intelligence driven operation. The police officers are facing a police tribunal and will be standing trial on the criminal charges. No other underlying current of corruption relating to trafficking or law enforcement officials is known.

Increasing Criminal Penalties

¶4. The Human Development Ministry received an IADB grant enabling a consultant to perform extensive research on the trafficking situation in Belize and to write an assessment and recommendations. The Committee reviewed the consultant's report in November and expects to implement some of the recommendations such as including the Ministry of Health and an additional NGO in the Committee membership. The IADB consultant's assessment also recommended increased penalties for trafficking offenses. The Committee has referred the recommendations to the Attorney General's Ministry and

to the Department of Public Prosecution for comments before proceeding to draft amendments to legislation. The Committee continues to discuss ways to incorporate recommendations from the IADB assessment but resource and time constraints slow the process.

Other Developments

¶ 15. The GoB has also taken significant steps to provide assistance to trafficking victims and promote public awareness of the issue. To aid victims, it has improved access to social services. The shelters in Belmopan and Belize City were cleaned up and are functional. The Ministry of Human Development received a grant from the U.S. Government in September to refurbish the Belmopan shelter. The Ministry is currently receiving bids for the project. Public awareness campaigns, largely through public service announcements have aired on major television and radio stations, and pamphlets and posters in English and Spanish have been distributed to government offices, NGOs, border crossings, embassies, and bus terminals. Additionally, members of the Committee and consultants have organized workshops for care-givers and the public to provide information on victim assistance.

¶ 16. Members of the Committee conducted several sensitization and awareness-raising sessions throughout the country for several audiences, including police, prison officers, customs, and immigration officers. The GoB has also been active on the international front -- the GoB co-sponsored a resolution at the OAS General Assembly in June to explore the possibility of establishing a Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism to assess countries' efforts in the hemisphere to combat trafficking in persons. The Minister of Human Development also led a delegation to the OAS to discuss and review model anti-trafficking legislation for the region.

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¶ 17. Although the Human Development Ministry received a grant from the U.S. Government for over US\$80,000 in September to combat trafficking, its grant linked to trafficking programs from the Meso-American Initiative for the Prevention of HIV/AIDS (IMPSIDA) of US\$32,000 was recently withdrawn due to a change in the criteria for the funding. Youth Enhancement Services, which reports to the Human Development Ministry, funded by a grant from the International Labor Organization, launched a pilot program to eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children which is frequently linked to trafficking in Belize. The goal of the program is to gain support from victims' parents and community leaders, to remove children from their places of employment and put them into schools and vocational training institutions as well as to prevent other potential victims in the Cayo and Belize City districts.

Comment

¶ 18. Comment. The GoB's programs for prevention and protection in the area of trafficking continued this year. Public awareness has been raised, progress relating to social programs and shelters for victim protection has been made, and law enforcement has been rudimentarily trained. However, the areas of prosecution and legislation need improvement. The Committee needs to push for legislative changes increasing the penalties for trafficking-related crimes. The IADB consultant's assessment has laid the groundwork but amendments will take substantial time to implement. However, even with tougher legislation in place, limited prosecution resources and a general unwillingness of victims to testify will continue to impede Belize's ability to combat its trafficking problem. End comment.

DIETER